

# PRAIRIE PAGES

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1848 view of  
Springfield, looking  
south from the Old  
State Capitol.



## Volume 8 Number 3

### Lincoln Bicentennial Issue: Lincoln's Years in Illinois 1830-1860

By Pete Harbison

#### LINCOLN MOVES TO SPRINGFIELD

##### **"I am moved"**

In April 1837, Abraham Lincoln gathered his personal belongings, filled his saddlebags, and rode a horse 20 miles from New Salem to his new home, Springfield.

In Springfield, Lincoln paid a visit to the general store of a former resident, Abner Ellis, to purchase bedding—a mattress, blankets, sheets, coverlet, and pillow. The clerk who waited on Lincoln that day was

Joshua Speed, and he would become Lincoln's best friend.

The two young men had some things in common. For example, they both had been born in Kentucky, but into very different backgrounds. Speed came from a rich, slave-owning family and Lincoln from a poor family of farmers. Both men supported the Whig political party, had rejected following in the footsteps of their fathers to strike out alone, and now both were living on their own in Springfield.

Joshua felt sorry for Lincoln and offered him a place to stay in his room above the store. Speed recalled the event later in life:

**He took his saddlebags on his arm, went up stairs, set them down on the floor, and came down with the most changed countenance. Beaming with pleasure he exclaimed, "Well, Speed, I am moved!"**

Speed and Lincoln rented a room together for the next three years.



### THE CAPITAL MOVES TO SPRINGFIELD

Lincoln had moved to Springfield in 1837 to continue serving his second term in the Illinois state legislature. He was one of nine men from Sangamon County serving in the state legislature in Vandalia. Because of their height—Lincoln was the tallest at 6'4"—they were called "The Long Nine." Five of the men were lawyers, three were farmers, and one was an innkeeper. Two served in the Illinois Senate and seven served in the Illinois House of Representatives. They all wanted the capital to be located in their county, in Springfield. The group, led by Lincoln, was successful and Springfield's future as the capital city was assured.

During the same legislative session in 1837, Lincoln made his first protest against slavery when he said slavery was "founded on both injustice and bad policy" when he stood in opposition to an anti-**abolitionist** bill in the statehouse.

### BACHELOR LIFE IN SPRINGFIELD

Lincoln was licensed to practice law in 1837, and he joined the practice of a former legislative colleague, John Todd Stuart. Stuart himself served many terms in the Illinois House of Representatives and as a U.S. Representative from Illinois. Lincoln would practice law for the rest of his years in Springfield. His reputation as a lawyer grew over the years. He made a good living and established himself as one of the best lawyers in central Illinois.

Lincoln had many important friends and associates in Springfield because he was a state legislator and a lawyer. His previous work as a postmaster, assistant surveyor for Sangamon County, and captain in the Black Hawk War had

also put him in contact with many influential people.

Springfield was home to many up-and-coming young men when Lincoln arrived. In the 1830s, Springfield had several clubs and organizations that enabled like-minded members to socialize. There were **temperance societies**, and church groups, but there were also many **fraternal groups** that allowed young men like Lincoln and Speed to spend evenings together with other men of Springfield. Lincoln enjoyed meeting new people, discussing politics, telling stories and jokes, and spending time in conversation. At this time, such conversation, discussion, and debate about the issues of the day were a big part of the social life of the city. Serving as New Salem postmaster put Lincoln in contact with community members with whom he would joke, tell stories, and become a friend. This widening circle of friends would help him in his political career. Another benefit for the postmaster was that he could send letters free of charge. Lincoln also read the newspapers delivered to other people in the village before they came to pick them up. He served as New Salem postmaster for three years.

### THE WHIG PARTY

Abraham Lincoln was deeply involved in promoting the new Whig political party in Springfield and other parts of state. Lincoln's political hero, **Henry Clay** of Kentucky, was one of the party leaders. Whig members supported government funding for improvements to roads, bridges, canals, ports, and railroads. Whigs believed better transportation would help develop new business in the frontier states. Illinois Whigs, including Lincoln, supported a **market economy** of mass-produced goods. They believed that manufactured goods, produced in the east coast factories and shipped at a reasonable cost to towns and cities in the frontier states, would improve the quality of life in the state.

The other major party, the **Democrats**, appealed more to the subsistence farmers and common laborers. The majority of Springfield voters supported Whig Party candidates over the Democratic Party candidates; however, Illinois as a whole was more loyal to the Democratic Party.

### GLOSSARY

**abolitionist**—a person who favored the end of slavery. **Anti-abolitionist** intended to discourage abolitionists activities.

**temperance society**—a group of people believing that the use of alcohol should be limited or prohibited

**fraternal group**—a club or organization allowing only men to be members

**Henry Clay**—a Congressman from Kentucky known for his speeches and work in government

**market economy**—

## GLOSSARY

**Democrats**—a political group

**Mexican-American War**—a war fought between Mexico and the United States for the territory of Texas

**court, courted, courtship**—activities leading to an engagement and marriage; like modern dating

**Globe Tavern**—a hotel or boardinghouse—not to be confused with the modern definition of a “tavern”



**Joshua Speed**

## SURVEYOR

Abraham Lincoln was a hard worker and did a good job for the Whigs. He traveled Illinois debating Democrats and became a well-known spokesman for the party. In 1838, Illinois elected its first-ever Whig Party member to the United States Congress. Lincoln's law partner, John Todd Stuart, won the seat and moved to Washington. While Stuart served in Washington, Abraham ran the law office in Springfield.

Lincoln also served in the U.S. Congress. He was elected in 1846 and was the only congressional Whig candidate to win in Illinois. The **Mexican-American War** was the most important issue during the session that Lincoln served in the U.S. Congress. Lincoln spoke out against President Polk and the war. Congressman Lincoln was criticized for taking this stance against the president, and when Lincoln's two-year term in Washington ended, he chose not to run for re-election.

## MARY TODD

Lincoln met his future wife, Mary Ann Todd, in 1840. She was from a large, wealthy family from Lexington, Kentucky. Mary was intelligent, well educated, spoke French, and

was used to having fine clothes and servants. She had come to Springfield to visit two of her sisters. Both sisters had married successful Springfield men.

Although **courted** by another young lawyer and politician, Stephen A. Douglas, who was considered an excellent match for the popular young woman, Mary was more interested in Abraham Lincoln. After an on-again-off-again, two-year **courtship**, Abraham and Mary eventually married on November 4, 1842, in the home of her sister, Elizabeth Edwards. Weddings were private, small affairs at this time. Couples did not have large wedding receptions, and because travel was difficult, most newlyweds did not take a honeymoon trip.

## THE NEW LINCOLN FAMILY

After they married, Mary and Abraham Lincoln moved to the **Globe Tavern** boarding house where they rented a room and had their meals in the dining room with other tavern guests. The eight-by-fourteen-foot room, meals, and laundry cost the Lincolns eight dollars a week.

Robert Todd Lincoln was born on August 1, 1843, and was named after Mary's father. Tradition held that the first-born son should have been named for Lincoln's father, but the couple chose to honor Mary's father instead. Many historians consider this to be an indication of Lincoln's unhappy relationship with his father. When Thomas Lincoln died in 1851 in Coles County, Lincoln did not attend his father's funeral.

Needing more room for his growing family, Lincoln purchased a house in early 1844, for \$1,200 from Rev. Charles Dresser, the Episcopal minister who had married the couple. The sale price also included another lot in the Springfield business district. The house at Eighth and Jackson streets would be the only home Lincoln ever owned. A second son, Edward Baker, was born on March 10, 1846.

## DAILY LIFE IN THE LINCOLN HOME

The Lincoln's daily life in Springfield in the 1840s was similar in many ways to that of a modern family. Lincoln left his house for work every morning, walking to his law office in downtown Springfield. Mary took care of the young boys and managed life inside their home at Eighth and Jackson. The Lincolns entertained friends in their home and the



## GLOSSARY

*ride the judicial circuit*—to hold court sessions in various towns, particularly towns too small to maintain a court on a day-to-day basis; lawyers and judges traveled on horseback to attend the court sessions

children played in the neighborhood. Mary shopped for the household and family needs in downtown shops and stores. The hardships Lincoln had endured as a boy were in the past.

As Lincoln earned more money from his law practice, much of it through his law work for the railroad, Mary was able to hire servants for cooking and cleaning. Unfortunately, Mary was a demanding woman when it came to servants. Many of the servant girls working in Springfield were from Ireland, and Mary referred to them as the “wild Irish” in a letter to her stepsister. Lincoln tried to keep peace between Mary and the servants, but most left the family because of the way she treated them. Some of Lincoln’s friends also thought Mary was bossy and difficult. However, even though she had a fiery temper, there is much evidence of her being a loving wife and mother and a real help to Lincoln in his career.

There were other things that made life difficult for the little family. One of those difficulties was the amount of time that Lincoln spent away from home. Every spring and fall lawyers and judges, including Abraham Lincoln, **rode the judicial circuit** in central Illinois. Each county

was on a schedule as to when its cases would be heard. Judges and lawyers would descend upon the county seat, making the county courthouse come to life. Riding the circuit kept Lincoln away from Springfield for about three months each spring and another three months in the fall. Another problem was Mary’s health; she suffered from severe headaches, so intense they would keep her in bed for days. These two things, plus the problem of keeping servants put a real strain on the family.



Written by Peter C. Harbison, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency  
 Edited by Laura Reyman  
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